

Empire 3G.

Europe's reinvention of empire

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!! Draft – for comments, not for citation!!

A growing strand of International Relations literature has flourished analyzing what it calls New Imperialism (Negri and Hardt 2000; XXX). Despite its label, this literature does not really study empires. In this literature, “imperialism” and “imperialist” are not adjectives mechanically derived from “empire” which could refer to the ideology of promoting empire or empire building – like “federalism” and “federalist” which refer to the ideology promoting a federal state or describe the building a federation. New Imperialism is a more or less distant heir to the Marxist tradition in which imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, so it is rooted in an economic theory of domination rather than in a political theory of polity building. It is also a very American centered literature in which “imperialism” and “imperialist” most often refers to a particular type of foreign policy if not to the foreign policy of the USA in its attempt to dominate the world. American centered, because in this literature, when the USA exports McDonalds and Coca Cola in the rest of the world, this is presented as a sign of American imperialism, but when Sweden exports IKEA in the rest of the world including the USA, this is not seen as Swedish imperialism, because it is not seen at all by this literature, let alone debated... Finally, because this literature is most of the time critical of the USA's foreign policy one can also say that it is to a large extent a normative theory. The concept of empire of the third generation (“Empire 3G”) presented in this article is not related to New Imperialism at all. It is embedded in political science, it focusses on politics and polity building, and it is not normative.

I have previously argued (2008, 2011), that the EU *is not* an empire. Not so much because it not one as because it has not stabilized yet. Therefore, it is not an international organization either, nor is it a federation. It doesn't help either that the EU refuses to commit to any label except that of a *sui generis* “thing” and of an “ever closer union”. Because of this, trying to label the EU has proven unsuccessful and blocked attempts to reflect on its “nature”. I find it more helpful to reason in terms of process and from there I consider that the European integration process has evolved in a way which we can analyze as a

process of imperialization – even if not exclusively (Gravier, 2011). But in this article, I wish to bring the discussion one step forward: my main argument will be to say that if the EU is to be considered an empire (or undergoing a process of imperialization), then it can only be an empire 3G.

The concept of Empire 3G reflects the attempt to conceive of a new model of empire which applies to the European Union. In this respect, this article belongs to a strand of literature reflecting on the use of empire within the context of the EU (Zielonka 2006, Beck and Grande 2004, Colomer 2007, 2011, Haldén 2010; 2011, Gravier 2009, 2011). But the concept is open to potential other cases of regional integration. It is loosely inspired by an essay written in 1907 by the German historian Otto Hintze who distinguished two types of empires (or ‘imperialisms’ – If I am to respect his vocabulary): what he called old type imperialism and new type imperialism. His essay is in many ways dated and may even seem useless in the eyes of scholars of the 21st century. But it also develops an idea which is interesting for my purpose. Hintze observed a change between empires that existed before his time and the ones he witnessed at the beginning of the 20th century. While both types of empire were conceived of as systems of rule and domination, old empires were characterized by the will of polities or political groups to dominate each other. As if they were setting forth the Roman conception of empire, each polity or political group which created an empire tried to exert its domination on its neighbouring territories and expanded as much as it could using various instruments ranging from force, to diplomacy or marriage policies in the attempt to become the only power “in the world” since there could be only one emperor. The so-called colonial empires, and here Hintze focuses suddenly very much on European empires, differ from this conception of empire in that European states which created empires did not try to control their neighbours but rather exported their desire for supranational domination to non-European territories. Thus, all major European states could have their own empire. European states did not care fighting anymore for imperial exclusivity. It is as if they had preferred agreeing on splitting the world among themselves so that all of them could have an empire at a time. This also meant that European empires no longer focused on Europe but on the rest of the world. In this paper, I will argue that the integration project initiated in the early 50’s which led to the EU as we know it today reflects a new change in European supranationalism, which I call empire of the third generation since it comes after the two types identified by Hintze.

(add here the outline of the paper)

Some methodological remarks

Part of the literature in political science on empires tries to build typologies opposing empires to other types of polities like states, federations, confederations, etc. (Gravier 2011, Colomer 2007), or types of political regimes like republic (Haldén, 2011) or types of international orders (Nexon, Parker). A few authors try to elaborate typologies distinguishing different types of empires (Zielonka). In this article, I use empire as a concept for the analysis and the comparison of a particular type of political systems and I propose a typology of European empires which distinguishes three generations of empire. Even though the notion of generation seems to indicate a genetic approach (see figure 1) these generations are not conceived of as necessary stages but as types which happen to have appeared successively in the European context. In other words, if – as will be suggested later – specific historical events explain the particular sequence in which Empires 1G, 2G and 3G appeared in Europe, what parts the three types of empires are characteristics which could be present in various historical contexts. Therefore, the three generations are in fact part of a typology (see figure 2): Empire 3G could appear elsewhere without having been preceded by Empire 2G or Empire 2G without having been preceded by Empire 1G.

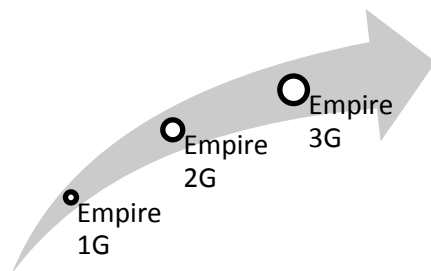


Figure 1: Genetic model

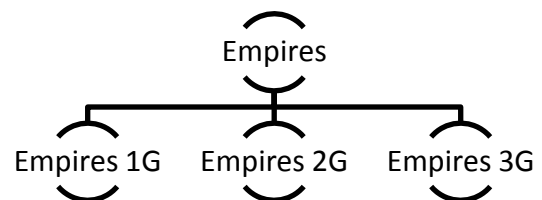


Figure 2: Typology

To readers of International Relations, a typology of European Empires may seem to lack ambition. A significant part of IR literature on empires likes to mention all empires of all times to give more weight to their theoretical framework. But I am a scholar of comparative politics and of Sartorian tradition. In this tradition, one is sensitive to the fact that increasing the number of cases (extension) necessarily comes at the expenses of the explanatory capacity (intension) of a comparison. Scholars of comparative politics are also sensitive to the fact that concepts do not travel well – neither in space nor in time. The

quest for a universal theory of empires may be tempting, but it might also explain why “empirologist” have never been able to suggest theories accepted by all, let alone a definition of what empires are. Bearing these points in mind, this article has a more modest ambition. It compares a limited number of cases belonging to one region of the world in order to increase the explanatory capacity of the typology elaborated.

Empires 1G and 2G: Hintze’s theory of imperialism revisited

In 1907, the German historian Otto Hintze wrote an essay on imperialism and world politics¹. The world has very much changed since then and it would be unthinkable to write this essay today. His essay is very much marked by the optimistic spirit of the early 20th century. This is a time where none of the two World Wars had happened and where the Germans could not imagine that three decades later their state would plan a level of destruction of humanity that still cannot be fathomed today. 1907 belongs to a happy era which the French call the “Belle Époque” (the “beautiful Era”). Europeans and Americans were full of hope in the future; they were convinced of the superiority of their culture and technology. Hintze obviously shared this belief when he distinguished between “big powers” (*Grossmächte*) and “second and third row states” (*Staaten zweiten und dritten Ranges*). Hintze’s world was of course dominated by the United Kingdom and the USA but he wanted to raise Germany among the “big powers”. This is probably why he argued that there was without doubt “a certain community of culture and interest” among several big powers (in other words, including Germany) “against the still uncultivated part of humanity”. Hintze observed that these big powers all developed their own empires but he deemed important to add that “the goal of German ‘world politics’ is not the aspiration for world domination, but the aspiration to keep the balance of power in the international system (*Weltstaatensystem*) of the future” (p. 468-469). Seen from today, much of Hintze’s argumentation in this text is as normative as outdated and cannot be used for the scientific value it might once have had. Historical facts are what they are and we know Hintze was wrong on Germany’s ‘world politics’. But other parts of this text, where the historian writes, not historical actor, are of interest, precisely because he was an eye witness of the last European empires and had a historical knowledge of how they functioned that has gone lost in much of today’s empirology. In particular, Hintze sketches a typology of empires (or imperialism in his vocabulary) that I find inspiring and use as a basis for my own typology of “generations” of empire. Hintze opposes two types of empires, those belonging to the

¹ “Imperialismus und Weltpolitik”, in Gerhard Oestreich (ed.), *Otto Hintze. Staat und Verfassung. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Allgemeinen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, p. 457-469.

category “old imperialism” and those belonging to the category “new imperialism” (which he also calls “world politics” – hence the title of his text). The major difference between these two types of imperialisms relates to the ideology of the empire: old imperialism tried to create “universal empires” or “world empires” (*Weltreiche*) in other words empires that did not tolerate rivals, while new imperialism tried to create several “world empires” that existed next to one another. (p. 469). So imperial ideology is both a driving force of imperialism (in the sense of empire-building) and a characteristic according to which Hintze develops his typology. When it comes to the selection of cases, Hintze is not explicit. If he mentions here and there empires of different eras and of different parts of the world, his more detailed analyses concern European empires – the ones he probably knows best.

Since my paper explores the potential imperial dimension of the EU, I will limit my analysis to Europe. Given this territorial delineation, Hintze’s typology corresponds roughly to an opposition between on the one hand what I would call the “Roman Empires” and on the other the empires of the 19th/20th century, with a transitory period between the 16th and 18th century. Maybe, as Hintze contends, does the Napoleonic Empire, created in the early 19th century, mark the juncture between the two types. In this article, the expression “Roman Empire” refers to one precise empire, the one which collapsed in the 5th century – there is no ambiguity here. I also use the expression “Roman Empires”, in the plural form, to cover all the empires that called themselves “Roman” following the doctrine of the *translatio imperii* (see below). In other words, the expression encompasses the “original” Roman Empire, and its successors like the Byzantine Empire (or “Eastern Roman Empire”) and the Holy Roman Empire. We could also add Charlemagne’s Empire after 800, when the King of the Franks became Emperor of the Romans – *imperator romanorum*. The *translatio imperii* was doctrine which was used by medieval lawyers to legitimate a newly founded empire by saying that the “empire”, as a political principle, had been passed on from the old empire to the new empire². In other words, the newly founded empire was a continuation of the previous one. Therefore, the adjective “Roman” no longer meant that the Empire was in Rome or ruled the people of Rome. “Roman” became an adjective relating to the Roman tradition of empire. It referred to a specific culture and in particular, a specific institutional, political and legal legacy, which evolved and faded away with each new “transfer” of the empire, even if the label “Roman” was kept as a tool of legitimacy. Constantinople was thus called the “Second Rome” and after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Czar Ivan III who had married the niece of the last Byzantine

² In Latin, *translatio* means to transport, to transfer, to transplant.

emperor started to call Moscow the “Third Rome”³ (or the “New Rome”), even if the Holy Roman Empire had long claimed its “Romanness” – long before the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, leading to the complicated coexistence of two competing Roman empires.

One of the important aspects of the ideology of the Roman Empire was its ambition to be a universal empire and hence the sole empire ruling the world – what Hinzte called “*Weltreich*”. But even Hinzte noted that this claim was a mere claim and that in reality, this was a very relative notion, since other empires existed in other parts of the globe. But what is important is the idea of imperial exclusivity. This meant that according to the ideology of the empire there could be only one empire and one emperor. For instance, from the point of view of the Byzantine *basileus* other rulers claiming to be called emperor were considered usurping the title, even if in everyday diplomacy, the *basileus* was well aware that in the Western part of Europe, there were other rulers claiming to be Roman emperors (first Charlemagne in 800 and from 962 on the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire) (Bréhier, 1970). But the notion of imperial exclusivity, so important in the Roman tradition, disappears progressively from the imperial ideology of the successive empires, which I suggest to call “post-Roman” empires, in other words, European empires which do not claim the Roman heritage anymore and which do not use the label Roman in their name either. Hinzte’s suggests convincingly that this political evolution is linked to the state building process that occurred in Europe somewhere in the 16th/17th century. For him, the emergence of a “system of states” (*Staatensystem*) in Europe comes along with the principle of mutual recognition among these states. While the principle of imperial exclusivity of the Roman Empire meant that empires did not recognize the legitimacy of other empires, the emerging European system of states is composed of political entities which might disagree on the exact location of their borders but do not deny the legitimacy of the existence of other similar entities – their sovereignty if one wills. The emerging system of states is indeed a system among “equals”. Very importantly for my purpose, Hinzte suggested that this evolution had an impact on the empires created during this same period. In a nutshell, the emerging European (nation) states kept their interest in creating “supranational” units (or “composite” if supranational is too anachronistic) but progressively changed their empire building strategy to adapt to the reality of the new system of state. In other words, the corollary of recognizing the legitimacy of the others European states, lead to the fact that European states progressively stopped organizing empires in order to exert domination over their immediate neighbours and instead exported their imperial strategy outside of Europe. It is as if the European states agreed on dividing the

³ For the sake of clarity, I will just mention in a foot note that, in fact, before Czar Ivan III, other kings related to the ruling dynasty of Byzantium claimed to be the perpetuators of the Byzantine Empire and their city to be the New Constantinople...

rest of the world among themselves, so that each European state which was powerful enough could have its own empire siding with the empires of other European states. The typology distinguishing empires by land (e.g.: ancient empires) and empires by sea (essentially the so-called “colonial empires”) probably tried to capture this transformation but it never really worked because the characteristic that distinguishes the two types of empire is not territory: in reality, many empires are by land and by sea at a time.

While it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly is the difference between these two generations of empires, or which set of characteristics can help conceptualize the difference between them, there is an agreement over the fact that a change progressively occurred in the world of empires. Hintze’s idea to link this transformation to the emergence of the state system is convincing. For him the Napoleonic Empire (1804-1814) marks best this transformation. Napoleon was still somehow inspired by the Roman Empire and he did try to gain control over Europe but, for Hintze, Napoleon did not try to create a “world empire” similar to the Roman Empire because this would have meant a dissolution of the French nation and of all other European nations in one big political unit which was no longer possible at that time (Hintze, 1970, p. 465-466). From here, we can refine Hintze’s analysis and suggest that the historical rupture was not complete before the later phase of the emergence of the European system of states, when these evolved towards nation states, because the notion of nation brought in a different understanding of the political unit. If we go back to the first French Empire with this in mind, we see that this evolution is very well reflected in the symbols chosen by the Emperor of the French: while the eagle reminds many readers of Rome it is also a symbol of Charlemagne, who was of course a Roman emperor but whom the French above all consider to be one of the fathers of the French nation. Next to the eagle, Napoleon also used bees and fleur de lys leading back to the Merovingians (bees) and the Capetian dynasty (fleur de lys). In other words, Napoleon’s Empire had its foundation in the French nation not in the Roman tradition. It sought its legitimacy in its young national roots not through the *translatio imperii*. As a matter of fact, Hintze saw Napoleon’s empire as a “big federal world system” (*ein grosses föderatives System der Welt*) and the French nation state as its dominating center and legislator. European empires that remained or were created after the collapse of Napoleon’s Empire (until the III^d Reich) belong the second generation: they do not focus on dominating Europe anymore, their core is a European state and their strategies of territorial expansion are oriented towards the world outside of Europe. This is the reason why the post-Roman empires are called “colonial empires”. Like all periods of transition, the period between the first generation of European empires and the second generation is difficult to grasp. It is likely that the feudalization of Europe played an important

role in the end of the Roman empires. At least, the feudalization of the Byzantine Empire is said to have been one of the causes of its collapse in that it weakened the internal structure of the Empire, which was then unable to resist to external pressures (Bréhier, 1970). However, the feudalization of Europe doesn't seem to have had an impact on the territorial policy of empires and it didn't necessarily change the ideology of the empires, that's why I would say that empires of this period still belong to the first generation of empires, but it had a significant impact on the organization of the center of power. The first two empires were organized around cities (Rome and Constantinople) while the next empires, already in the feudal era, were organized around dynasties (e.g.: the Carolingian, the Hohenstaufen, the Habsburg – let us here recall that the Holy Roman Empire never had a fixed capital). But both types of empires still claimed to control more or less contiguous chunks of the Mediterranean/European area and held their legitimacy from Rome either because they called themselves a Roman empire or because their emperor called himself/herself a Roman Emperor/Empress. The second generation of empires is different: these empires were organized around a state, their legitimacy was no longer in their Roman heritage, but in the roots of the core state and they expanded exclusively outside of Europe. The phrasing is worth noting here: some states already had overseas colonies before they became an empire. In other words, some states *had* an empire before they *were* an empire – to phrase it in the words of Maier (2006). For instance, the first French overseas colonies date back to the first half of the 16th century, while the first French “Empire” was created in 1804. So the difference between the first and second generation of empires is not the possession of overseas colonies or not, but whether the Empire was still expanding inside Europe in the attempt to put all of Europe under one roof or the Empire's peripheries were more or less (but rather more than less) exclusively outside of Europe.

Table 1: Characteristics of Empires 1G and Empires 2G

	Empires 1G - “Roman empires” -	Empires 2G - Colonial empires -
Legitimacy	Rome and <i>translation imperii</i>	Own national history
Ideology	Exclusivity	Plurality
Core	City and then Dynasty	State
Territory	Europe / South Europe + Mediterranean area	Outside of Europe

To sum up, an evolution took place in the way European empires were created and organized. This evolution affected various aspects of the empires as can be seen in table 1: their legitimacy, their ideology, their core and their territory. A combination of these four characteristics helped me suggest the existence of two types or “generations” (since they appear in a historical sequence) of empires. But tackling European imperial history does not just reveal an evolution of empires, it also reveals one constant in the history of the European continent which is the ongoing attempt to create “supranational” or “composite” polities. The political and institutional recipe evolved over time, but the fundamental idea of big composite multicultural systems of governance was always there ever since the path breaking Roman experience and Europe has remained on this path since then. In other words, the European trajectory is characterized by a path dependence on “big composite multicultural systems of governance”. From this point of view, today’s European integration project appears a mere continuation of this path... with another recipe. I call it the “Empire of the third generation” or Empire 3G.

What is Empire 3G?

Just like the evolution from Empire 1G to Empire 2G reflected a series of political, institutional and ideological transformations, so does the evolution from Empire 2G to Empire 3G. Two major events or sets of events happened around and slightly after the birth of the new European integration project. First of all World War II, which almost destroyed Europe and was powerful a catalyst enough to force it to reinvent itself. Second decolonization, initiated by the colonies which fought for their freedom, deprived the European states from their territorial overreach. One should add a third element which was more a process than an event: the progression of democracy. According to Huntington (1991), democracy was established and consolidated in Western European countries during the first two waves of democratization and many of the former European colonies democratized during the third wave of democratization, in other words, more or less at the same time as decolonization. I would like to suggest in the following section that, all together, these elements (World War II, decolonization and democratization) created a context where Empires 2G could not be envisaged anymore and which paved the way for Empire 3G. In a way, like Empires 1G had not survived the statist-national revolution, Empires 2G did not survive the democratic revolution. But democratization alone was not enough to explain a move towards Empire 3G in Europe: World War II acted as a catalytic event (see figure 3).

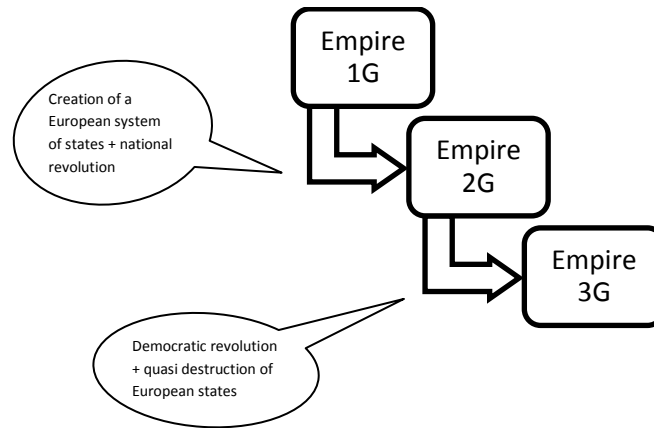


Figure 3: Empires 1G, 2G and 3G.

What characterizes European Empire 3G or a move towards it is a set of three elements: supranational path dependence, a switch back to focusing on Europe as a territorial basis, the invention of a new type of “imperial core”. As already expressed earlier, if we consider the past 2000 years of history on the European continent, one can say that the formation of composite or supranational polities has been the norm in Europe. This path of “supranationalism” can be traced back at least to the Roman Empire. It is worth reminding that European empires did not disappear during the long period of formation of the European states, not even during the emergence of the nation states. Some contend that the empire building and the state building processes not only went hand in hand, but that the first one contributed to the second one (Ref??). Even the experience of the III Reich was not enough to shift Europe away from its supranational path dependence, quite the opposite: the creation of the ECSC was presented as an instrument meant to prevent war between European nations, in particular France and Germany (Schuman Declaration, 1950). But while supranational or composite experiments developed in various configurations century after century, none of these experiments ever reached a full political integration, in other words the creation of a unified European state, let alone nation. Europe never had a fully integrated political structure and never reached cultural unification. The linguistic diversity which still exists in Europe is a very good illustration of this: some 60 languages are still spoken today in Europe (Gravier and Lundquist, 2011). From this point of view, European empires have offered an in between situation where there was always more than a disorganized coterie of isolated political units next to one another, but always less than an integrated polity spreading over a whole region (like the USA, China, India, or Russia). European empires have offered some level of regional integration enabling some kind of circulation of goods, wealth, culture and people. They maintained more or less efficiently peace within their borders without absorbing the constitutive units, which continued to exist separately

sometimes only as distinct cultural units within a homogenous political structure, sometimes also as distinct political sub-units. However, the repeated experiences of belonging to the same supranational experiments lead to the progressive development a common meta-framework, which offered a solid basis for the creation of the European communities, despite what Eurosceptics contend a bit too quickly. This framework comprises broad religious, moral and political principles but also more specific and technical institutions. A good example of this is the fairly quick agreement between the founding member states when it came to the creation of the ECSC's civil service, and later the extension of this civil service to the two other communities. The founding states shared a similar type of civil service (career civil service) and a similar legal system (inherited from the Roman experience), therefore they could fairly easily agree on a similar type of civil service at the EC/EU level. To sum up, the political history of the European continent has been characterized by a particular path dependence which is both supranational and only partly-integrated (i.e.: empires as opposed to a fully integrated state). From this point of view, the creation of the European Communities in 1951 and 1957 and their constant deepening into today's configuration – the EU – appears as a continuation of the same path of supranationalism.

A sub-section on legitimacy is still missing!!!

Things start changing when it comes to territory. Given the experience of National Socialism and World War II, some of the West European states felt the need to modify the territorial focus of their foreign policy and refocus on their own continent. Much needed to be reconstructed and repaired, and a solution needed to be found to prevent war from happening again. In particular, France's and Germany's belligerent behaviours needed to be kept under control and creating a European superstructure appeared as the only solution to this problem. This is also the reason why the first European Community was dedicated to Steel and Coal: back in those days, these two industries were key warfare industries. Putting them under the control of a sovereign supranational institution was expected to make war impossible – as is stated explicitly in the Schuman Declaration. Combined with the impulse coming from the colonies which lead to decolonization, in other words the collapse of the Empires 2G, this strategy led back after a few decades to what characterized Empires 1G: uniting Europe in one political structure. One may argue that overseas territories still exist (Colomer, 2011), but they do not characterize the territorial strategy of today's EU, they are only residual aspects of Empires 2G of some individual member states. Further, and probably for the first time in European history, today's supranationalism is explicitly limited to Europe by the Treaties. Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) indeed states that only European states may become Member States. This leaves

open the question of the ultimate borders of Europe, of course, but given the geography of the continent, this only applies to the Eastern border. Since Article 2 of the same treaty states that to become a member state a state must share the values of the EU, we can conclude that only European states can become part of the EU but not all European states can at any time become a member. Being European is a necessary condition, but it is not sufficient. Still, Article 49 has implication regarding the characteristics of the EU's empirehood. It is commonly agreed that empires are characterized by territorial openness and I have already argued that this is a major characteristic of empires (Gravier 2011). If empires are characterized by open borders, and given that Article 49 of the TEU implies that the EU has at least in theory maximal borders (i.e.: "Europe") one may ask what would happen if all possible member states indeed became member states. If, one day, the EU were to have integrated all possible member states, it would not be able to expand anymore therefore one could argue that it would not qualify for empirehood anymore. But one could also argue that since Article 50 of the TEU allows a Member State to leave the EU (and to reenter it again), in theory, the territory would still remain open, but only for shrinkage. So it would still qualify for empirehood. However, if it stabilized in its full size without losing territorial units, one could start raising the issue of a transformation of the EU, maybe towards a federal polity. To sum up on this sub-section on territory, as opposed to Empires 2G which expanded outside the European territory, the EU as an Empire 3G goes back to a territory limited to the European continent. From this point of view, Empire 3G resembles Empire 1G. In the words of Charles Maier, European imperialism evolved from *being* an empire (Empires 1G) to *having* an empire (Empires 2G) back to *being* an empire again (Empire 3G). This also explains why the EU still isn't very powerful when it comes to its external action and to waging war outside its borders: this is not its original mission. Its original mission was to take care of its "continental self" and in particular to provide peace and wealth to its members. The idea that the EU should "speak with one voice" with the outer world or that it should be able to engage in military actions with whichever goals is the result of a more recent evolution, which has forced the EU to become something else for which it was not and still isn't well equipped (despite the new external action service). But this doesn't necessarily affect the EU's empirehood: the Holy Roman emperor didn't have an imperial army at its disposal, Byzantium's military capacity didn't compare with the Roman military capacity (Luttwak, 2010), which explains why it relied so much on its diplomacy (Luttwak 2010, Bréhier, 1970) and why it was more active in defensive wars than in offensive wars.

The issue of the imperial core is where Empire 3G differs most from Empires 1G and 2G. When Europe abandoned the path of Empire 1G in the wake of the emergence of a European system of states and of the national revolution, this was more or less the end of the idea that one European state could dominate the other states. The evolution away from Empire 2G meant that European states couldn't continue dominating states outside of Europe either – democracies do not do that to each other. So it would be difficult to imagine a new form of European imperialism which would not take these evolutions into account. The conundrum solved in the Empire 3G recipe consisted in finding a way to create a core above all member states (that's where we can start using the concept of empire) but a core which would not be under the control of one member state, since this solution had been progressively rejected. The creative solution of the European integration project has been to create a core which is an institutional and political stratum above each of the *individual* member states but controlled by all member states *collectively*. It is not important for the EU's empirehood – or Empire 3G – that it is not built around a state: only Empires 2G were created around a state. Empires 1G were created around a city (Rome, Constantinople) or later, in the feudal era, around a person or a dynasty. It doesn't matter either for the EU's empirehood – or Empire 3G – that it doesn't have a single capital. With three fixed capitals (Brussels, Luxemburg and Strasburg), which might one day converge towards one single capital (Brussels), it is better equipped than the Holy Roman Empire. What matters is the capacity of the core over the member states and the relations between the core and the individual member states.

The issue of the capacity of the core is where one can discuss the EU's empirehood in other words whether the EU is an Empire 3G or not. Pros and cons are probably equally acceptable: whether the glass is half empty or half full is often a question of attitude. Based on the historical evolution towards more integration (of course in a not-linear process and with backlashes and moments where things are stalled), I tend to see a glass which is filling itself. I do not know if it will ever be full – scientists cannot predict the future – but I observe an incredible transformation from the early and hesitant days in the early 50s and today's EU. In others words, for the moment, and on the basis of historical facts, I think it is sustainable to say that a process of imperialization is taking place. But if I speak of imperialization, it is only along the lines of Empire 3G – the EU is neither an Empire 1G nor an empire 2G. Due to the particularity of the core in the 3G type, one can raise the issue of a hybrid "imperial federation": maybe Empire 3G is a hybrid between empire and federation.

The same goes for the relations between the core and the individual member states. One of the particularities of empires is that the relations between the core and the individual peripheries are very diverse, according to what each peripheral unit is able to negotiate with the core (Nexon, 2008). “Negotiate” is here important: opposite to what too many scholars of International Relations contend too quickly, empires didn’t just imposed untenable conditions to their peripheries. This may be a major part of the relations between cores and peripheries in Empires 2G. But it was not so in Empires 1G where some peripheries had indeed no choice (those defeated by the core and absorbed without a say), but many other peripheries negotiated the terms of their participation in the empire (those which entered freely in the empire and which provided it with military capacity to protect the frontier, or those which had wealth and could lend money to the empire, or deliver important goods for the internal commerce, etc.). In other words, in the world of empires, some peripheries are imposed a bitter imperial menu while others experience a much more tasty empire *à la carte*. If we bear this in mind when observing the EU, we see a slow and hesitant, maybe even disappointed and reluctant move from the hope for fairly uniform conditions to all member states (the last attempt may have been the establishment of the so-called Copenhagen criteria) to admitting a Europe *à la carte*. What is essential in this evolution is the acceptance of the idea that Europe *à la carte* is maybe not a failure of the integration project, but the only solution to keep so many different member states within the same political composite unit. So what has changed is not just that there is more cherry-picking in the membership than before. In a sense member states always cherry-picked their membership. What has changed is the acceptance of this fact; the fact that cherry-picking is no longer seen as a pathological phenomenon. A certain normalization of Europe *à la carte* can be seen in the institutionalization of what is called *enhanced cooperation* since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997 – **check!**). Following Nexon analysis of empires (2008), this evolution where it is accepted that peripheral units (the member states) can negotiate different formulas of membership can be analyzed as a sign of imperialization.

Conclusion

This article has argued that a new form of empire may have appeared or rather is being invented. I have called it Empire 3G to distinguish it from two previous historical forms of empire (see table 2). I also contend that if the EU is to be considered an empire, than it can only be an Empire 3G – it is obviously not an Empire 2G let alone an empire 1G.

Table 2: Comparison between the three generations of European empires:

	Empires 1G - “Roman empires” -	Empires 2G - Colonial empires -	Empire 3G
Legitimacy	Rome and <i>translation imperii</i>	Own national history	Own regional history and a set of values
Ideology	Exclusivity	Plurality	Plurality
Core	City and then Dynasty	State	A supranational institutional stratum
Territory	Europe / South Europe + Mediterranean area	Outside of Europe	Europe
Examples	Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire, Carolingian empire, Holy Roman empire, Habsburg Empire	Spanish Empire, British Empire, First French Empires, Dutch Empire	One example up to now: the EU

Why is the concept of empire 3G relevant? Because this helps show that opposite to what political actors and, with them, too many scholars contend much too quickly, the EU is not a just *sui generis* “thing”. Europe has experienced empires almost non-stop since at least the Roman Empire. Said otherwise, ever since the Roman Empire, Europe has remained on a path of supranationalism. This path has taken a few smooth turns (Empire 1G, feudal Empires 1G, Empires 2G), but even the traumatizing experience of the III Reich was not enough to produce a shift away from supranationalism. Quite the opposite since the only solution which was found to protect Europe from it and the terrible destruction it lead to was again another supranational experiment. From this point of view, the EU is the product of a longstanding path dependence in Europe which pushes political units to unite loosely in a political structure. Each historical era has come with different challenges and therefore with different supranational recipes but the path of supranationalism has neither been invented by the EC/EU, nor abandoned by it; it has just been reinvented by it. Further, opposite to what some political leaders contend about European nations, national histories, and national identities, the history of the European continent reveals that European populations share a long and complicated history which hasn’t just created national differences but also common references.

Empire 3G also bears the idea that despite what Empire 1G contented, empires were never really world empires [*Weltreich*, as Hinzte phrased it] but solutions for regional integration. In this respect, if the EU and its leaders are inventing Empire 3G, this solution could be used as an inspiration in other regions of the world in need of respect for differences but also of pacification and cooperation. As an inspiration but not a model: institutions are embedded in history therefore they can never be copied identically elsewhere.

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